

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A gaming system for playing a competitive bonus game comprising:
  - a first gaming apparatus comprising:
    - a game display unit;
    - a value input device;
    - a controller operatively coupled to said game display unit and said value input device, said controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to said processor,
    - said controller being programmed to cause said game display unit to generate a game display relating to one of the following games: poker, blackjack, slots, keno or bingo,
    - said controller being programmed to determine a value payout associated with an outcome of said game;
  - a second gaming apparatus operatively coupled to said first gaming apparatus;
  - a bonus controller operatively coupled to said first and second gaming apparatuses, said bonus controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to said processor of said bonus controller,
  - said bonus controller being programmed to receive wagering data from said first and second gaming apparatuses,
  - said bonus controller being programmed to enter a first player at said first gaming apparatus into said competitive bonus game when said first player obtains a qualifying win at one of said games generated by said game display unit of said first gaming apparatus,
  - said bonus controller being programmed to determine odds for said first player to win said competitive bonus game,
  - said bonus controller being programmed to vary odds of winning said competitive bonus game for at least a second player after entering said first player into said competitive bonus game, said second player having been previously entered into said competitive bonus game,
  - said bonus controller being programmed to determine an outcome of said competitive bonus game, and

said bonus controller being programmed to transmit data corresponding to said outcome of said competitive bonus game to said first and second gaming apparatuses.

2. A gaming system as defined in claim 1 wherein said game display unit  
5 comprises a video display unit that is capable of generating video images.

3. A gaming system as defined in claim 2,  
wherein said controller of said first gaming apparatus is programmed to cause  
a video image comprising an image of at least five playing cards to be displayed if  
said game generated by said game display unit of said first gaming apparatus  
10 comprises video poker,

wherein said controller of said first gaming apparatus is programmed to cause  
a video image comprising an image of a plurality of simulated slot machine reels to be  
displayed if said game generated by said game display unit of said first gaming  
apparatus comprises video slots,

15 wherein said controller of said first gaming apparatus is programmed to cause  
a video image comprising an image of a plurality of playing cards to be displayed if  
said game generated by said game display unit of said first gaming apparatus  
comprises video blackjack,

wherein said controller of said first gaming apparatus is programmed to cause  
20 a video image comprising an image of a plurality of keno numbers to be displayed if  
said game generated by said game display unit of said first gaming apparatus  
comprises video keno, and

wherein said controller of said first gaming apparatus is programmed to cause  
a video image comprising an image of a bingo grid to be displayed if said game  
25 generated by said game display unit of said first gaming apparatus comprises video  
bingo.

4. A gaming system as defined in claim 1 wherein said game display unit  
comprises at least one mechanical slot machine reel.

5. A gaming system as defined in claim 1 comprising a remote display  
30 for displaying said competitive bonus game.

6. A gaming system as defined in claim 1 wherein said bonus controller is programmed to determine a type of qualifying outcome corresponding to said outcome of said game generated by said game display unit of said first gaming apparatus and vary odds of winning said competitive bonus game for said first player  
5 and said second player according to said type of qualifying outcome.

7. A gaming system as defined in claim 1 wherein said bonus controller is programmed to vary odds that said first player or said second player will win said competitive bonus game after any of said first player, said second player, or a third player qualifies for said competitive bonus game after playing said game generated by  
10 said game display unit of said first gaming apparatus.

8. A gaming system as defined in claim 1, wherein said first and second gaming apparatuses are operatively coupled via the Internet.

9. A gaming system for playing a competitive bonus game comprising:  
a first gaming apparatus comprising:

a display unit;

a value input device;

5 a controller operatively coupled to said display unit and said value input device, said controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to said processor of said first gaming apparatus,

10 said controller being programmed to receive data representing a payline selection made by a first player,

said controller being programmed to cause a game display to be generated by said display unit, said game display comprising images of a plurality of slot machine symbols each of which is associated with a respective slot machine reel,

15 said controller being programmed to determine a value payout associated with an outcome of said slots game, said controller being programmed to determine said outcome of said slots game based on a first configuration of said slot machine symbols;

20 a second gaming apparatus operatively coupled to said first gaming apparatus, said second gaming apparatus comprising:

a display unit;

a value input device;

25 a controller operatively coupled to said display unit and said value input device, said controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to said processor of said second gaming apparatus,

said controller being programmed to receive data representing a payline selection made by a second player,

30 said controller being programmed to cause a game display to be generated by said display unit, said game display comprising images of a plurality of slot machine symbols each of which is associated with a respective slot machine reel,

said controller being programmed to determine a value  
payout associated with an outcome of said slots game, said  
controller being programmed to determine said outcome of said  
slots game based on a configuration of said slot machine  
symbols;

a bonus controller operatively coupled to said first and second gaming  
apparatuses, said bonus controller comprising a processor and a memory  
operatively coupled to said processor of bonus controller,

said bonus controller being programmed to receive wagering  
data from said first and second gaming apparatuses,

said bonus controller being programmed to enter said first  
player at said first gaming apparatus into said competitive bonus game  
when said first player obtains a qualifying win at said slots game,

said bonus controller being programmed to determine odds for  
said first player to win said competitive bonus game,

said bonus controller being programmed to vary odds of  
winning said competitive bonus game for at least said second player  
after entering said first player into said competitive bonus game, said  
second player having been previously entered into said competitive  
bonus game,

said bonus controller being programmed to determine an  
outcome of said competitive bonus game, and

said bonus controller being programmed to transmit data  
corresponding to said outcome of said competitive bonus game to said  
first and second gaming apparatuses.

10. A gaming system as defined in claim 9 wherein said display units of  
said first and second gaming apparatuses comprise video display units that are capable  
of generating video images.

11. A gaming system as defined in claim 10, wherein said controllers of  
said first and second gaming apparatuses are programmed to cause video images  
comprising images of a plurality of simulated slot machine reels to be displayed on  
said display units of said first and second gaming apparatuses.

12. A gaming system as defined in claim 9 wherein said display units of said first and second gaming apparatuses comprise at least one mechanical slot machine reel.

13. A gaming system as defined in claim 9 wherein said controllers of said first and second gaming apparatuses are programmed to receive payline data representing a number of paylines selected by said first and second players, respectively.

14. A gaming system as defined in claim 9, wherein said bonus controller is programmed to qualify said first and second players for said competitive bonus game when one of the following events occurs:

said first and second players play said first game and obtain a specific outcome,

said first and second players play said first game and obtain a plurality of specific outcomes,

15. said first and second players play said first game a predetermined number of times,

said first and second players play said first game for a predetermined duration of time, and

20. said first and second players play said first game a plurality of times and wager a predetermined sum of money over said plurality of times.

15. A bonus controller for generating a competitive bonus game in a gaming system, said bonus controller comprising:

a processor;

a memory operatively coupled to said processor,

5           said bonus controller being programmed to receive wagering data corresponding to a game selected from one of the following games: poker, blackjack, slots, keno or bingo,

10           said bonus controller being programmed to enter a first player associated with a first gaming apparatus into said competitive bonus game when said first player obtains a qualifying win at one of said games,

          said bonus controller being programmed to determine odds for said first player to win said competitive bonus game,

15           said bonus controller being programmed to vary odds of winning said competitive bonus game for at least a second player after entering said first player into said competitive bonus game, said second player having been previously entered into said competitive bonus game,

          said bonus controller being programmed to determine an outcome of said competitive bonus game, and

20           said bonus controller being programmed to transmit data corresponding to said outcome of said competitive bonus game.

16. A bonus controller as defined in claim 15, wherein said bonus controller is programmed to:

          determine a type of qualifying win corresponding to said game selected from one of said games: poker, blackjack, slots, keno or bingo, and

25           vary odds of winning said competitive bonus game for said first player and at least said second player according to said type of qualifying outcome.

17. A gaming apparatus as defined in claim 15, wherein said bonus controller is programmed to:

qualify said first player for said competitive bonus game when one of the following events occurs:

- 5        said first player plays said game and obtains a specific outcome,
- said first player plays said game and obtains a plurality of specific outcomes,
- said first player plays said game a predetermined number of times,
- said first player plays said game for a predetermined duration of time, and
- said first player plays said game a plurality of times and wagers a
- 10     predetermined sum of money over said plurality of times.

18. A bonus controller as defined in claim 15, wherein said bonus controller is programmed to initiate said competitive bonus game when all of a fixed number of available competitive bonus game entries have been won.



19. A gaming method, comprising:

causing a game display of one of the following games to be generated on a display unit of a first gaming apparatus: poker, blackjack, slots, keno or bingo;

5 causing a game display of one of the following games to be generated on a display unit of a second gaming apparatus: poker, blackjack, slots, keno or bingo;

determining an outcome of said game represented by said game display generated on said display unit of said first gaming apparatus;

10 transmitting wagering data from said first gaming apparatus to a bonus controller;

determining if said outcome is a qualifying outcome for a competitive bonus game;

15 qualifying a first player at said first gaming apparatus for said competitive bonus game if said outcome is a qualifying outcome;

varying odds of winning said competitive bonus game for said first player and at least a second player after qualifying said first player for said competitive bonus game, said second player having been previously qualified for said competitive bonus game;

20 initiating said competitive bonus game;

transmitting display data associated with said competitive bonus game from said bonus controller to a display unit; and

determining a value payout associated with a bonus outcome of said competitive bonus game.

25 20. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, additionally comprising: determining a type of qualifying outcome corresponding to said outcome, and varying odds of winning said competitive bonus game for said first player and at least said second player according to said type of qualifying outcome.

21. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, additionally comprising:  
qualifying said first player for said competitive bonus game when one of the  
following events occurs:

5 said first player plays said game generated on said display unit of said first  
gaming apparatus and obtains a specific outcome,

said first player plays said game generated on said display unit of said first  
gaming apparatus and obtains a plurality of specific outcomes,

said first player plays said game generated on said display unit of said first  
gaming apparatus a predetermined number of times,

10 said first player plays said game generated on said display unit of said first  
gaming apparatus for a predetermined duration of time, and

said first player plays said game generated on said display unit of said first  
gaming apparatus a plurality of times and wagers a predetermined sum of money over  
said plurality of times.

15 22. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, additionally comprising  
initiating said competitive bonus game on a periodic basis.

23. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, additionally comprising  
initiating said competitive bonus game when a competitive bonus award associated  
with said competitive bonus game reaches a predetermined amount.

20 24. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, additionally comprising  
varying odds that said first player or said second player will win said competitive  
bonus game after any of said first player, said second player, or a third player  
qualifies for said competitive bonus game after playing one of said following games:  
poker, blackjack, slots, keno or bingo.

25 25. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, wherein initiating said  
competitive bonus game comprises initiating one of the following competitive bonus  
games: a race-type competitive bonus game, a screen-clearing competitive bonus  
game, or a Ferris wheel type competitive bonus game.

26. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, wherein transmitting said wagering data comprises transmitting one of the following wagering data: a specific outcome of said game generated on said display unit of said first gaming apparatus, an amount wagered by said first player, a duration of play by said first player or a status  
5 of said first player.

27. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, wherein transmitting said display data comprises transmitting said display data to a remote display unit.

28. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, wherein transmitting said display data comprises transmitting said display data to said display unit of said first  
10 gaming apparatus.

29. A gaming method as defined in claim 19, wherein varying odds of winning said competitive bonus game comprises varying the number of entries into said competitive bonus game.

30. A gaming method, comprising:  
15 causing a video image representing a game to be generated at a first gaming apparatus, said video image representing one of the following games: video poker, video blackjack, video slots, video keno or video bingo,

said video image comprising an image of at least five playing cards if said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus comprises video poker,  
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said video image comprising an image of a plurality of simulated slot machine reels if said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus comprises video slots,

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of playing cards if said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus comprises video blackjack,  
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said video image comprising an image of a plurality of keno numbers if said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus comprises video keno, and

said video image comprising an image of a bingo grid if said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus comprises video bingo; and,

determining an outcome of said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus;

determining if said outcome of said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus is a qualifying outcome for a competitive bonus game;

qualifying a first player for said competitive bonus game if said outcome of said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus is a qualifying outcome;

varying odds of winning said competitive bonus game for said first player and at least a second player after qualifying said first player for said competitive bonus game, said second player having been previously qualified for said competitive bonus game;

causing a video image representing said competitive bonus game to be generated, said video image representing said competitive bonus game representing one of the following competitive bonus games: a race-type competitive bonus game, a screen-clearing competitive bonus game, or a rotating wheel type competitive bonus game;

initiating said competitive bonus game;

generating a randomized computation of an entry to modify according to said odds associated with said entry; and

identifying a winner of said competitive bonus game.

31. A gaming method as defined in claim 30, additionally comprising: determining a type of qualifying outcome corresponding to said outcome of said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus, and

varying odds of winning said competitive bonus game for said first player and at least said second player according to said type of qualifying outcome.

32. A gaming method as defined in claim 30, additionally comprising:  
qualifying said first player for said competitive bonus game when said first player  
plays said game represented by said video image generated at said first gaming  
apparatus and obtains a specific outcome, or when said first player plays said game  
5 represented by said video image generated at said first gaming apparatus a  
predetermined number of times.

33. A gaming method as defined in claim 30, additionally comprising  
initiating said competitive bonus game on a random basis.

34. A gaming method as defined in claim 30, additionally comprising  
10 initiating said competitive bonus game when all of a fixed number of available  
competitive bonus game entries have been won.

35. A gaming method as defined in claim 30, wherein said varying odds  
comprises at least one of changing an entry weight for an entry into said competitive  
bonus game, and adding an additional entry into said competitive bonus game.

15 36. A gaming method as defined in claim 30, comprising varying odds of  
winning said competitive bonus game by a remote bonus controller.

37. A gaming method as defined in claim 30, comprising varying odds of  
winning said competitive bonus game by a controller of a first gaming apparatus.

20 38. A gaming method as defined in claim 37, comprising initiating said  
competitive bonus game by a controller of a second gaming apparatus.

39. A method of providing a competitive bonus game in a gaming network, comprising:

receiving wagering data at a bonus controller, said wagering data corresponding to play of one of the following games at a gaming apparatus:

5 poker, blackjack, slots, keno or bingo;

qualifying a first player for said competitive bonus game if an outcome of said game played at said gaming apparatus is a qualifying outcome;

10 varying odds of winning said competitive bonus game for said first player and at least a second player after qualifying said first player for said competitive bonus game, said second player having been previously qualified for said competitive bonus game;

initiating said competitive bonus game;

15 transmitting display data associated with said competitive bonus game from said bonus controller to a display unit, said display unit being operatively coupled to said bonus controller; and

determining a value payout associated with an outcome of said competitive bonus game.

40. A gaming method as defined in claim 39, additionally comprising:  
20 determining a type of qualifying outcome corresponding to said outcome of said game played at said gaming apparatus, and

varying odds of winning said competitive bonus game for said first player and at least said second player according to said type of qualifying outcome.

41. A gaming method as defined in claim 39, additionally comprising initiating said competitive bonus game on a periodic basis.

25 42. A gaming method as defined in claim 39, additionally comprising initiating said competitive bonus game when a competitive bonus award associated with said competitive bonus game reaches a predetermined amount.

43. A memory having a computer program stored therein, said computer program being capable of being used in connection with a bonus controller in a gaming system, said memory comprising:

5 a memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause said bonus controller to receive wagering data corresponding to a game, said game selected from one of the following games: poker, blackjack, slots, keno or bingo;

10 a memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause said bonus controller to enter a first player into said competitive bonus game when said first player obtains a qualifying win at one of said games corresponding to said wagering data;

a memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause said bonus controller to determine odds for said first player to win said competitive bonus game;

15 a memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause said bonus controller to vary odds of winning said competitive bonus game for at least a second player after entering said first player into said competitive bonus game, said second player having been previously entered into said competitive bonus game;

20 a memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause said bonus controller to determine an outcome of said competitive bonus game; and

25 a memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause said bonus controller to transmit data corresponding to said outcome of said competitive bonus game to a display unit.

44. A memory as defined in claim 43 wherein said memory additionally comprises a memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause said bonus controller to:

30 determine a type of qualifying win corresponding to said qualifying win corresponding to said wagering data, and

vary odds of winning said competitive bonus game for said first player and at least said second player according to said type of qualifying outcome.

45. A memory as defined in claim 43 wherein said memory additionally comprises a memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause said bonus controller to generate video images corresponding to said competitive bonus game on said display unit.